



Daniela Rohleder

Conference Report

Lest ihr noch oder schreibt ihr schon? Fanfiction im Archiv

ABSTRACT

The workshop “Lest ihr noch oder schreibt ihr schon? Fanfiction im Archiv” (“When Readers Become Writers: Fan Fiction in the Archive”) took place on the 20th and 21st of March 2025 via Zoom. It was hosted by the German Literature Archive Marbach (DLA) in cooperation with the Eberhard-Karls-University of Tübingen. Responsible for the conference concept were Sarah Schnitzler (DLA) and Prof. Dr. Angelika Zirker (Eberhard-Karls-University of Tübingen).

KEYWORDS

archival practices, fan fiction, fandom history, creative writing, canon, Germany, transformative works

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Fan fiction transforms, updates, and brings familiar sources to life in a new way through social and interactive possibilities. But what role does fan fiction play in the German-speaking world? And for which authors and stories of the German-language canon can we find fan fiction? In what ways does fan fiction impact literature and those who work on it? Situated within this field of tensions between canonized literature and transformative fan writing, the workshop “Lest ihr noch oder schreibt ihr schon? Fanfiction im Archiv” aimed to explore the topic with the aid of a number of acclaimed experts. Organized by members of the German Literature Archive Marbach (Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, DLA) in cooperation with scholars from Eberhard-Karls-University of Tübingen, the two-day digital event brought together 14 researchers from Germany and abroad. In a virtual setting, they presented their research and discussed and analyzed creative writing from a variety of perspectives and with different approaches. The event was attended by a large number of guests, who also joined the discussion.

Dr. Natalie Maag, Head of the Library at the DLA, opened the workshop. In her welcome address, she emphasized that the responsibility of archives and libraries must apply not only to analogue sources, but also to online ones. The ephemeral nature of web-based sources calls for decisive action in particular. A thematic introduction into fan fiction research was then provided by literary scholar Prof. Dr. Angelika Zirker from Eberhard-Karls-University of Tübingen. Using the poem *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love* (1599) by English poet Christopher Marlowe and the literary replica *The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd*, published shortly afterwards, she made clear that the creative examination of and transformative play with existing literature has a long-standing tradition and is by no means only a phenomenon of modern literary history.

The subsequent academic contributions were organized thematically into five panels: “Fan Fiction and the Archive I and II,” “Fan Fiction and the Canon I and II,” and “Fan Fiction and Online Platforms.” The first panel was opened by Sarah Schnitzler and Jochen Walter of the DLA, who are working on archiving fan fiction as well as on the cataloguing of digital literature. Emphasizing the special features and difficulties of archiving digital fan fiction, they presented the archival approach of their project: The concept of fan fiction is captured in its complexity—as a social, collaborative, subversive practice in constant flux. As such, it is important to consider not only the pure text, but also the ‘look and feel’ of digital literature.

The first day of the workshop included a discussion of Vladimir Nabokov’s 1977 novel draft, *The Original of Laura (Dying is Fun)*, whose fragmentary structure has encouraged fans to write their own index card texts in the style of Nabokov’s writing (Jessica Maaßen, University of Erfurt). Another presentation was dedicated to the topic of fan fiction set in the context of the Holocaust (Jennifer Erhardt, University of Gießen), which is controversial due to its sensitive historical background, but also contributes to preserving the memory of the past and making it accessible to a contemporary audience. A presentation of the GOLEM project (Federico Pianzola et al., University of Groningen) explained the possibilities offered

by a database in which, for example, narrative and stylistic comparisons can be made between millions of stories. The first day of the workshop concluded with an evening lecture by renowned fan fiction scholar Prof. Dr. Kristina Busse, currently an independent researcher at the University of South Alabama. She presented the non-profit Organization for Transformative Works (OTW), which acts as the institutional foundation for the largest fan fiction internet archive, Archive of Our Own (AO3). Busse provided a look behind the scenes of a key institution in the development of fan fiction and fandom scholarship over the last twenty years, stimulating a lively discussion that was also joined by OTW founding member Francesca Coppa.

The second day of the workshop was occupied with perspectives on how readers engage with centuries-old classic literature through fan fiction. A close reading of *All the Young Dudes*, one of the most popular *Harry Potter* fan fictions, provided insight into the relationship between fan fiction and the literary as well as the musical canon (Nina Heise, Goethe-University of Frankfurt). Another topic was the co-creativity of reception and fan fiction production (Ina Berner and Yves Herak, Eberhard-Karls-University of Tübingen). Dedicated to German canonized authors Goethe and Schiller, the next presentation brought into focus a discrepancy between fan fiction's progressive reputation on the one hand and the possibility of reproductions of existing power structures and a white, male canon through fan fiction on the other (Patricia Heise, Goethe-University of Frankfurt). Another presentation problematized the clichéd assumption of the 'end of literature' as a result of digitalization, when all the while, diverse literary practices are being actively cultivated on literary platforms such as Wattpad and Fanfiction.net (Maria Kraxenberger, University of Stuttgart). The concluding presentation dealt with the creative community of *Harry Potter* fan fiction writers and used concrete examples to illustrate how the long-term observation of online fan activities can help us gain a better understanding of the development of fandoms (Vera Cuntz-Leng, Philipps-University of Marburg).

The various research approaches, diverse perspectives, and lively discussions that ensued over the course of the two workshop days emphasized Schnitzler and Walter's conclusion from their introductory lecture: the collection of fan fiction at the DLA is a representation of the many ways in which fan fiction and canonical literature mutually stimulate, extend, and enrich each other in a reciprocal relationship.

